

*Proposal file*

An Opportunity To Convert  
The Charles Ringling Mansion  
Into The New College Library

A PROPOSAL AND INVITATION TO THE JAMES FOUNDATION

of

New York

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## INTRODUCTION

Occasionally an opportunity presents itself in which a great objective can be achieved through a relatively small investment of time and money. Such an opportunity has arisen at New College in Sarasota, Florida with the decision to convert an existing building into the College Library.

Among its many assets of well situated property lining the gentle curve of beautiful Sarasota Bay, New College prizes most highly the beautiful marble mansion built in 1925 for Charles and Edith Ringling. This handsome building of graceful and elegant proportions reflects the devotion and careful research of Architect Clas, of Milwaukee, who was retained and instructed to study the best examples of Renaissance mansions in Europe before designing the Ringling home.

The library, housed in this mansion, would be in the midst of the world famous \$30 million complex of Ringling Museums which includes not only the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, but also the famous John Ringling home, Ca d'Zan and the unique and charming Asolo Theatre, the only 18th Century Italian theatre in America. This fabulous complex of great collections of Baroque and modern art works, surrounded by stately courtyards and classic rose gardens highlighted by towering palm trees, is also the home of a winter season of drama and opera and a Summer Comedy Festival featuring the classics of the Elizabethan stage ----- all in the Asolo Theater.

The placing of the New College library in such a setting of cultural achievement and practice would be desirable under any circumstances, even

if ample funds were available to design and construct a new building. Such construction, however, is not only not necessary, it is undesirable. A fine beautiful building is available of community and area renown, richly laden with memories of another age which lovingly and intelligently graced the Sarasota Bay waterfront.

Moreover, the mansion lends itself very practically to conversion into a library. Its sound steel-framed and poured concrete construction assures adequate strength for support of book-stacks, easy and inexpensive room arrangement remodeling, the installation of air-conditioning and other necessary equipment for its use as a library.

Special collections can well be housed in some of the larger specialized use rooms. The Billiard Room, for example, with its dark mahogany paneling and six rare Dominican mahogany side chairs could easily be converted into an excellent special collection room. The Dining Room with its beautifully frescoed ceiling and great refectory table could become an attractive reference-reading room, overlooking the waterfront.

The Music Room with its beamed ceiling, walls and flooring of teakwood is equipped with a pipe organ and piano -- the scene of many Ringling Family musicales and entertainments featuring such great artists as Mme. Schumann - Heink -- could, with relatively simple modifications, be the library's 225 - seat music and lecture hall. Other inexpensive remodeling will provide a large reference and reading room on the waterfront, several special collections rooms, sound-proof typing rooms, audio-visual rooms, and administrative and processing offices for the library staff.



In short, the former Charles and Edith Ringling home could easily be converted into the home of a modern New College Library. Its spacious and varied rooms, halls, arcade and courtyard provide more than adequate space for the needs of a library. Its varied room design, inviting alcoves, broad curving marble stairs and valuable furnishings all provide an ideal setting -- an atmosphere conducive both to the pursuit of knowledge and graceful living.

While the building is in sound condition and repair, much could and should be done to restore it to its former state of elegance and at the same time to modernize and "build in" the necessary library features, including furnishings and equipment in style and mode that would harmonize with the total design and furnishings of the mansion.

Modernization features would include complete air-conditioning, re-wiring of antiquated circuits, new lighting where needed, study carrels, adequate rest-rooms and rebuilding of the elevator. Such a program of restoration, remodeling and refurbishing would not only give the college a magnificent library building for a relatively small investment, but also assure the community that one of its finest examples of Renaissance architecture would be preserved to serve an honorable and useful function with distinction.

To achieve such a program which will convert the Charles Ringling mansion into the New College Library, the Trustees and President of the College seek support in the amount of \$150,000. The investment would provide the College with a library facility worth well over \$1.5 million -- a return

of approximately 1000 per-cent on the investment! It would also provide the secondary benefit of stimulating in a challenging manner those many friends of the College who are especially interested in contributing funds in support of the book collections.

Knowing of the James Foundation's interest in developing improved college library facilities, the Trustees and President of New College invite the Foundation to participate with the College in the program outlined above which will provide the library facility needed to undergird the College's charter years program outlined in the succeeding pages. A grant of \$150,000 from the Foundation now -- that the program might be completed in time for the September Charter Class -- would enable the College to achieve a library building of lasting significance and beauty--an elegant and graceful home for the pursuit of knowledge by students, faculty and community alike.

## II. A Great Library: The Challenge For New College

A new star in the constellation of colleges in America will soon open its doors. The product of nearly four years of careful research and planning, selective recruitment of faculty and students and intensive fund-raising and development efforts, New College of Sarasota, Florida is almost ready to offer quality higher education to superior students of great promise.

The excitement about New College is engendered by four principal factors: 1.) The newly designed and flexible curriculum of three 11-month academic years -- each year consisting of three 12-week terms each followed by a 4-week independent study period -- which in method incorporates the best features of graduate and tutorial programmed education and in content is thoroughly grounded upon the broad base of the three major divisions of the Natural and Social Sciences and the Humanities; 2.) The superior teaching and research resources of the faculty; 3.) The extremely superior quality of the Charter Class students; 4.) The superior facilities being planned to exploit in a creative manner the confrontation of student and teacher.

While many of the facilities of the new campus can and will be built as plans are developed and funding requirements are met, it is recognized that the development of a great library is an essential element of the highest priority. Interim dormitory, classroom and laboratory facilities can be arranged pending the completion of the basic campus buildings, but a library of significance must be made available to students and faculty alike from the very first day of class work.

The challenge of establishing a great library at New College is the more pressing because of the experimental and flexible curriculum which provides for much independent study and research at all course levels. The book collections, for instance, cannot be confined to the typical undergraduate texts but rather must be extended in depth to cover research interests of students, faculty and community alike. The reason for this orientation at New College and its subsequent reliance upon a significant library, is to be found in the assumptions which undergird the New College philosophy of education.

These assumptions are:

1. Each student is responsible, in the last analysis, for his own education.
2. The best education results from the active confrontation of two first-class minds.
3. The greater the degree of flexibility, the greater is the likelihood that students will reach the highest levels of which they are capable.
4. Student progress should be based on demonstrated competence and real mastery, not merely the accumulation of credits and grades.
5. The best liberal education derives from real mastery of a small number of really vital ideas, principles, and modes of analysis.
6. True liberal education requires an appreciation for unity of knowledge.



7. Students should have from the very outset opportunities to pursue in depth studies of areas that interest them.

The New College curriculum and program is intended, fundamentally, to permit and encourage students to attain power and competence in intellectual analysis and a deeply rooted desire to go on learning -- throughout their lives. This ideal implies a fruitful face-to-face relationship between student and faculty which is ordinarily not obtainable quantitatively or qualitatively. It also implies the immediate accessibility of a first rate library resource, which offers more than books and is fully conducive in atmosphere, arrangement and resources to effective study and learning through all media.

Perhaps the objectives are best stated in the words of the Provost and Dean of the College, Dr. John W. Gustad, when he notes that:

"True education, the search for truth, does not exist when students are merely told what they must know. It occurs only when students are admitted to the fellowship of scholars and given the opportunity to work with these scholars. When students learn the truth for themselves, then, and only then, are they liberally educated."

The implementation of this philosophy can be clearly seen in the non-classroom features of the New College curriculum, all of which connote the use of a library as an integral unit in the learning process. Some such features are:

1. Each eleven month academic year includes three independent study and reading periods.
2. The seminar and tutorial teaching methods stressed at New College rely heavily on information and knowledge gained by the student from non-class sources.



3. The student advances at his own pace, and seeks admittance to more advanced studies by presenting evidence of his mastery of a field through independent study.
4. The core curriculum for the student's third year is a combination of an advanced, specialized project in depth and a seminar on great issues each demanding intensive, scholarly research and independent study -- much of it in the library.

In short, the library for the New College student will not be a mere cold adjunct to the classroom, from whence to borrow a book for his class "homework"; the library at New College will be the living, dynamic center of student intellectual life: ---- his "home" for his life as a scholar. Therefore, the library is much more than a repository of books; it is a communications center -- a warm, living, intimate, familiar place of grace and beauty, for study but also for meditation and contemplation; a place of hard work, but also a place where music and art may grace the work, adding their gentle reminders of the universality and unity of knowledge.

### III. Early Development of the Library

Thus, within the framework of the New College philosophy of education the library will be the meeting place for the best in our culture of both old and new. New ideas will spring forth from old books; old ideas will take new meaning in new books. New and old methods of study and learning will be featured side by side.

The book collection will be used in stacks, open to all students, and each student will have a separate study carrel —both old and venerable methods of using library collections. On the other hand, every mechanical and electronic aid which will ease the accessibility of information to the scholar will be used. The objective of the library will be to make information and knowledge on any given subject available in depth but at the same time not to attempt an impossible and wasteful collection of every conceivable book on every conceivable subject, though methods will be examined to utilize other collections close at hand in the area.

At New College many of these old and new ideas have either already been planned or are instituted. The open stacks with the core of basic reference sections in the Arts, Sciences and Humanities have for more than a year gradually begun to fill the allotted second floor rooms. Early acquisitions for browsing or detailed study include the great encyclopedias, English and foreign language dictionaries, bibliographical aids, a large collection of the Greek and Latin classics, along with selected classics from other cultures and countries, all in their original language. Major

reference works and collections have been acquired in all the basic Natural Sciences. In short, the heart of the library --- the reference section --- is already a comprehensive and scholarly collection.

Convenient to and actually within the stacks, space has been reserved for students' individual study carrels. All cataloging and processing methods are being keyed to the ultimate use of electronic equipment as it becomes feasible and will enable New College to make use of data retrieval systems as they are developed. Finally, New College is cooperating with eight other institutions in the area in the development of a union catalog which will provide easy access to more than 350,000 volumes housed in these several libraries.

While many different types of aids to learning will be featured, book collections will constitute the major portion of the New College library. Volumes are now being ordered from the California New Campuses Program List, compiled by the University of California. Specialized ordering is also being done to meet the requests of each faculty member. As designed, College Hall will presently house about 100,000 volumes and several hundred periodicals and learned journals.

The same attention is being given to acquiring specialized aids to learning. Recordings, photocopies, tapes, microfilms, motion picture films, photographs, musical scores and even paintings will all play a full part in the development of the New College library.



#### IV. CONCLUSION

This then is the essence of the opportunity confronting New College at this important moment of its development. It is our hope that the President and other officers of the James Foundation will see merit in offering a grant of \$150,000 to New College for the purposes stated in this proposal. The program of converting the Charles and Edith Ringling mansion into a modern New College Library offers a prospect of unusual high return, not only in terms of replacement value, but also in terms of providing a significant and enduring library facility of usefulness and beauty.